

Georgia's CMAQ Program

Background

In 2004 and 2005, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated several Georgia regions for nonattainment of ozone and/or fine particulates, respectively. Designations were based on the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Areas so designated are eligible to receive Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) funding.

Congress created the CMAQ Program for the explicit purpose of helping areas attain air quality standards by investing in projects that decrease transportation related air pollutants. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) administers and allocates funds to state DOTs for investment in eligible projects located in the state's nonattainment areas. FHWA holds each state's DOT accountable for the most effective use of its CMAQ funds, first for air quality benefits and second for congestion benefits. A quantitative (qualitative for pilot programs) emissions analysis must demonstrate anticipated air quality benefits before a CMAQ-funded project may be included in the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) or the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Fine particulate (PM_{2.5}) nonattainment areas are eligible for CMAQ funds even though the SAFETEA-LU did not include these areas within the formula that allocates CMAQ funds to each state. As a result, Georgia's CMAQ funding level will be stretched among both ozone and PM_{2.5} nonattainment areas. Until the 2004 and 2005 designation, nonattainment was confined to the Atlanta area. EPA's recent proposal for more stringent fine particulate standards will likely result in additional Georgia nonattainment areas. It is apparent that: 1) a consistent, statewide approach to CMAQ project selection is necessary; 2) the approach must include an educational or training element concerning the uniqueness of CMAQ funds; 3) the limited CMAQ funds should be invested based on the air quality benefit to the State's efforts to attain air quality standards; and 4) the project selection process must be independent of the inconsistent, unpredictable nature of LRTP/TIP schedules in nonattainment areas. It should be noted that due to limited CMAQ funds, less beneficial projects should not be funded in one nonattainment area if another nonattainment area has unfunded highly beneficial projects. CMAQ funds will be made available for projects located in each nonattainment area, but will not be sub-allocated to each nonattainment area.

CMAQ Call for Projects

Therefore, given the above approach and being in accordance with the Federal CMAQ guidelines, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the Environmental Protection Division (EPD), the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), and the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA), together known as the State Air Quality Partners (SAQP), developed a statewide project selection process that can be used consistently across the State of Georgia. The CMAQ project selection process is as follows:

- a) GDOT issues a statewide call for projects every other year (off cycle call may be needed initially)
- b) The MPOs actively participates with the State in the review and rating process
- c) Final project ratings are based on group consensus
- d) Project ratings and comments are reviewed by all
- e) The State and MPO participate in the joint final selection process through group consensus
- f) Final project selection will be fiscally constrained

- g) Project selections must be drawn from the highly recommended (d) projects in order for project funds to be authorized

CMAQ Formula

CMAQ funding formula for the State of Georgia was approved by FHWA during 2006. The approved Formula breaks the CMAQ funds into three categories: Statewide, Donut Areas, and MPOs. The state-level funding category is taken off the top and can fluctuate, at a modest scale, from year to year as funding needs are coordinated with the non-attaining MPOs. The Statewide category includes GDOT's ongoing TDM Measurement efforts and the TDM activities currently conducted by the Clean Air Campaign. The Clean Air Campaign (CAC) was selected via RFP to manage Statewide TDM activities such as employer services, advertising, PR, incentives, and school outreach/educational programs. Funding levels and work activities for the CAC will be coordinated with the non-attaining MPOs; hence possible modest yearly funding fluctuations.

The second category is associated with Donut Areas. Donut Areas are whole or partial counties located outside the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) planning boundary but inside the nonattainment area boundary. The Department represents these areas. Funds not allocated toward highly beneficial projects will be re-allocated to other areas with highly beneficial projects identified. Funds for projects in donut areas are aggregated (not sub-allocated to counties) to facilitate selection of the most effective projects.

The third category represents the majority of CMAQ funding and will be available for nonattaining MPO projects rated "highly recommended" during the State CMAQ Call for Projects. To maximize effective investment, CMAQ funds should not be used for less effective projects if another nonattainment area has unfunded highly beneficial projects. This is consistent with the Department's responsibility to maximize the effectiveness of the CMAQ Program.

CMAQ funds will be made available to each nonattainment area, but are not sub-allocated to each nonattainment area. The CMAQ Formula serves as a funding guide, but should not be perceived as sub-allocating funding to the nonattainment area. The CMAQ Program and formula will be reviewed periodically to ensure CMAQ funds are used to the maximum benefit of air quality and congestion.